

THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA ON THE DEMOCRATISATION OF UKRAINE

A friendly policy in the darkness of international politics

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Abstract

This article argues that the effectiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) cannot be studied without taking into account the realpolitik ambitions of Russia in the ‘Near Abroad’. The European Union (EU) was rather optimistic in the post-Cold War period because it experienced a full transformation of the world order. The new political order facilitated the democratisation process of a number of Central and Eastern European countries. It turned out, however, that the optimism of 1990’s and early 2000’s cannot be translated in the ENP for several reasons. Russia’s assertive foreign policy is a serious impediment vis-à-vis the democratisation efforts of the EU since the former weakens the statehood of Ukraine and thus makes it nearly impossible to implement democratic reforms. Therefore, this article defines the ENP as a “friendly policy” meaning that it is able to induce changes provided that the neighbourhood is more or less peaceful and there is no third party which would use its hard power to prevent the objectives of the ENP.

Keywords: European Neighbourhood Policy; theories of international relations; democratisation; Ukraine; Russia.

1. Introduction

The 2003 European Security Strategy was full of confidence. The document stated that “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history” (European Council, 2003: 1). It is a common sense to say that “time has changed” but it is perhaps true: time has really changed. It is interesting to see how Europe and its international relations have changed over the past two decades. In the 1990’s, full of hopes: the former member of the Soviet Union will become member of the European Union (EU). In the early 2000’s, still some hope: the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have also the chance to

transform the new neighbours. In the late 2000's: the ENP is failing. In November 2013: the ENP failed. With the buzzwords of the ENP, the evolution can be described from "ring of friends" to "ring of fire".

While enlargement policy has been clearly one of the most successful foreign policy instruments of the EU, the ENP has not been capable of radically transforming the political and economic systems of the partner countries. The problems are manifold: the lack of membership perspective, the absence of massive financial incentives, the hesitant behaviour of the targeted governments behaviour vis-à-vis European integration, the disinterest of some EU member states concerning the future of some ENP countries, etc. all make it very difficult to draw these countries closer to the EU. The literature has been also very successful in showing how these factors inhibit the effectiveness of the ENP.

Nonetheless, this article argues that there is a component which has been mainly missing from the literature of the ENP: Russia's realpolitik ambitions in Ukraine (and perhaps in other Eastern European states as well). The impact of Russian foreign policy on Ukraine has not been completely neglected, however, it was studied from the perspective of interdependence (Dimitrova – Dragneva, 2009; Lavenex – Schimmelfennig, 2009) or the clash of integration process painting a "tug-of-war" picture between the EU and Russia (Casier, 2007). Nevertheless, with the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, it became clear that Russia's ambitions are much more than attempts to draw Ukraine economically closer to itself. The case of Ukraine demonstrates the return of realpolitik which, in turn, has clear implications on the democratisation outlook of the country.

In order to show how Russia affects the democratisation efforts of the EU, this article, first, is looking for the question of why the current literature of the theories of the ENP have excluded the realpolitik ambitions of certain states and argues that the optimism of the post-Cold War period has overshadowed the probability of blatant interventions in Europe. Instead of focusing on realpolitik, many analyses emphasized the impact of economic and financial incentives on partner countries. Second, it presents the main changes in Russian foreign policy and claims that a careful analyse of Russia's international interests has to be always part of any assessment which aims at examining the impact of the ENP on Eastern European countries. Third, it shows how the outlook of the ENP has changed given the new circumstances in Ukraine. It concludes that the ENP is a "friendly policy" which means that its objectives can only be achieved in a peaceful neighbourhood and cannot tackle the new realpolitik challenges in the neighbourhood.

2. Optimism everywhere

2.1 Optimism in international politics and brightness in Europe

After witnessing the collapse of the Soviet Union, the majority of policy-makers and scholars were optimist about the prospect of world politics. In his famous speech, George W. H. Bush realized that the Soviet leadership had changed its behaviour to a more cooperative approach vis-à-vis the West and thought that Moscow would join the global economic and political system

dominated by the West. Seeing the changes in the international system, he even spoke about a “new world order” in which military confrontation would be ruled out. Peaceful negotiations would replace the old reflexes between states (Bush, 2009). The optimism about the world order had been reinforced by the fact that Boris Yeltsin and his liberal-minded foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev were open to adopt Western norms and values. They completely changed the discourse on the international order and called for the necessity of policy convergence in the world (Tsygankov, 2010). It seemed that the enthusiastic expectations of the early 1990s would be a reality in the post-Cold war period.

The optimist political discourse was strengthened by scientific works as well, especially by the magnificent philosophical book written by Francis Fukuyama. His thesis is well-known around the world: liberal democracy is the “final form of human government” (Fukuyama, 1989: 2). He does not claim that liberal democracy lacks economic and social problems. However, he argues that the desire for recognition, which is a quintessential notion in his analysis, can only be achieved in liberal democracies. Pessimism, which dominated the 20th century, no longer holds for the second half of the century since “the world as a whole has not revealed new evils, but has gotten *better* in certain distinct ways” (Fukuyama, 1992: 12). According to Fukuyama, only liberal democracy survived in the end of 20th century from the different types of regimes. In other words, “there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy” (Fukuyama, 1992: 45). The premises of realism in international relations are “no longer fit the world” and they treat “a disease that no longer exists” (Fukuyama, 1992: 252-253).

Whether realist or liberal arguments are closer to any scholar, empirical data show that optimism cannot be fully neglected. In fact, recent developments in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) clearly show that both the governments and people wanted to replace their old political and economic systems to liberal democracy and market economy. Not only Western Europe had been already building its peaceful and prosperous areas but also CEECs were also willing to join the club of Western countries. Nationalism and confrontation were replaced by cooperation between those states which had remarkable disagreements over the past decades. When national interest is determined by CEECs, it is never about territorial disputes anymore – which had been always part of the agenda in the recent centuries – but it is related to economic purposes. Never in the past two decades could one hear a prime minister or president in the CEECs talking about foreign policy adventures which would jeopardize other neighbouring nations. Hungary, for example, has even renamed its foreign ministry to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade indicating that the main purpose of foreign policy is to achieve economic objectives of the government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011).

The governments and the population of the CEECs hoped that transforming their states would fundamentally change the way how they had lived before. It is obvious that the freely elected governments and the population of the CEECs were willing to follow the model of the Western European states. By declaring that the main foreign policy priority is the “return to Europe”, the newly elected governments aimed at adopting the norms and values of liberal democracies. After decades of oppression, the population was also convinced that the only way their countries can

transform if they follow the Western modes of governance. The “soft power” of the EU was immense because every citizen located in the CEECs wanted to live like Austrians, Germans or French.

Being the most important actor in encouraging changes in its neighbourhood, the EU was also sharing the optimism during the 1990’s. The example of Hungary and Poland boosted its confidence that not only these two states but others would be also able to follow the leading examples. The 1990’s clearly showed that the majority of the CEECs were keen to join the EU and would implement all the necessary reforms in order to become a member of the EU. Some countries performed better while others achieved the same objectives in a slower pace, but the overall picture was that the EU fostered the democratic consolidation of the CEECs. In 2004, a historical step in its existence, the EU had been enlarged with ten new members – mostly from Central and Eastern Europe – and later, Romania, Bulgaria and then Croatia also joined the community. Enlargement policy has been one of the most successful foreign policy instruments of the EU given that the membership perspective has always been the biggest incentive to aspirant countries. Meanwhile, the wish of strengthening relations between the enlarged EU and the new neighbours remained intact, however, it was also clear that the new political relations would not be based on the promise of accession.

2.2 ENP: optimism in the darkness?

The enlargement process and the idea of building closer relationship with the new neighbourhood proceeded in parallel in the early 2000’s. The ENP was designed by those who had worked previously on the enlargement policy (Kelley, 2006). This is one of the main reasons why optimism did not disappear after the 2000’s. While acknowledging the difficulties of transforming Eastern European states, it was widely believed that the EU can – sooner or later – achieve the same, or almost the same objectives which had been reached in CEECs. The idea of building closer relationship with the new neighbourhood was raised in 2002 by the European Commission and the High Representative (HR) Javier Solana. The General Affairs Council meeting, held in April 2002, welcomed the intention of the Commission and of the HR on the possibilities for establishing relations between the enlarged EU and its Eastern neighbours (Council of the European Union, 2002).

The success of enlargement gave the EU further appetite to extend its rules and norms in its new Eastern and Southern neighbourhood. By establishing the ENP in 2003, the EU aimed at creating a “ring of friends” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003) which would gradually adopt its standards, norms and rules. While it is obvious that the EU has always been reluctant to give membership perspective to these countries, the ultimate aim has been to bring the neighbourhood as closer to the EU as possible both politically and economically. The EU was rather optimistic in achieving the same – or almost the same – objectives in the medium or long-term. This optimism was reflected in several policy documents and scholarly works.

In his famous speech, Romano Prodi, former President of the European Commission, declared that that “The EU looks certain to remain a pole of attraction for its neighbours. For many of the countries in our future “backyard” the EU is the only prospect [...] I want to see a “ring of

friends” surrounding the Union” (Prodi, 2002). Released in 2003, the European Security Strategy (ESS) can be also considered a rather optimistic policy document. It states that "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history” (European Council, 2003: 1). It further confirms that “We live in a world that holds brighter prospects but also greater threats than we have known” (European Council, 2003: 6). It is worth noting that the document enumerates a number of challenges but remains mainly positive on the status of the EU and its international relations.

Wider Europe, the document which gave the framework to the ENP, reaffirmed that the “EU should aim to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 4). It takes into account that relations with Russia were not always easy but, if compared to Belarus, “the development of EU/Russia dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues, energy, environment and science and technology over the past few years accelerated rapidly” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 4-5). The Strategy Paper on the ENP reiterates the creation of four common spaces agreed at St Petersburg in May 2003. Given that the EU and Russia became close neighbour, the paper draws the attention to the need to work together on common concerns (Commission of the European Communities, 2004).

In sum, the prospects were rather good in continuing the success of enlargement. It seemed that liberal democracy did not stop at the borders of Central European states but it could be fostered in Eastern Europe as well. Furthermore, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine showed that, apart from external actors, several internal factors also supported the idea of the possibility to create a more democratic and Western oriented countries in Eastern Europe as well. Viktor Yushchenko was not only the President of Ukraine but a symbol as well for the West that Ukraine may choose – for medium or longer term – the path of the European integration, or some of its form, despite having no membership perspective.

2.3 Optimist ENP theories?

Finding the optimist or “liberal” dimension of the ENP literature requires a much more sophisticated approach. Of course, there is no such thing that *The theory of the ENP*. The policy can be approached from theoretical several perspectives and studied from different angles. One of the most common approaches to examine the policy is to scrutinize how its main tool, political conditionality works. I argue that the theory of the effectiveness of political conditionality – both concerning the enlargement policy and the ENP – builds mainly on the theories of liberalism. They are liberal because they treat states which fundamentally seek to attain economic purposes. In other words, they simply assume that states are motivated by economic incentives and this is practically the only reason why they are moving closer or farther from the EU. They implicitly assume that democratisation depends basically on the size of the financial incentives available or, in other cases, the internal structure of a particular state may also determine its objectives which, in turn, is another liberal perspective.

A great number of studies – mainly elaborated by Frank Schimmelfennig and his collaborators – deal with the question of the effectiveness of political conditionality. These studies significantly contributed to our knowledge concerning the possibilities of EU foreign policy in the neighbourhood. It was argued that the efficacy of political conditionality depends on the possible domestic political costs paid by the candidate governments. Other factors – such as social influence or transnational mobilization – do not affect the decisions of the candidate countries (Schimmelfennig et al., 2003).

In another study, three models of external governance are determined. First, external incentive model assumes that actors are “profit oriented” and adopt rules provided that the benefits exceed the domestic adoption costs. Second, the social learning model – just as in the case of grand theories – is an alternative to rationalist explanations which sees candidate countries capable if internalizing identities, norms and values and can be persuaded of the appropriateness of EU rules. Third, the lesson-drawing model assumes that states adopt the rules of the EU if those imply a solution to domestic problems. Similarly to the study written in 2003, the result is that external incentives model explains why CEECs adopt the rules and norms of the EU (Schimmelfennig – Sedelmeier, 2004). Studying specifically the ENP and creating a case study on Belarus, Schimmelfennig states that the outlook for the ENP is bad for three reasons: (1) the lack of major incentive (membership), (2) the threat of compromising the main purposes of the conditionality and (3) the adoption costs are too high (Schimmelfennig, 2005).

In another study, Schimmelfennig argues that the effectiveness of political conditionality depends on three conditions: (1) the size of international rewards, (2) the size of domestic adoption costs, and (3) the credibility of political conditionality. He adds that authoritarian regime can impede the rule transfer. In Eastern Europe, he determines three more conditions as “long-term effectiveness”: countries with liberal, antiliberal and mixed party constellation. He finds that liberal parties facilitate the transformation. In the neighbourhood, the EU and NATO has “good chance of promoting democracy effectively – provided that reform – and Western-oriented political forces come to power” (Schimmelfennig, 2007: 136).

Schimmelfennig and Scholtz claims that “the impact of EU democracy promotion will be severely weakened where EU incentives are small – as is the case for those countries of the European neighbourhood that do not have a membership perspective” (Schimmelfennig – Scholtz, 2007: 5). They determine three mechanisms of democratisation. First, conditionality, second, modernization (implying that the more well a nation do, the greater probability it will have to build its democracy), and third, linkage (implying that transnational factors affect the country concerned). They find that “the EU has successfully promoted democracy in its neighbourhood; that it owes its success to the use of political conditionality; and that the effectiveness of political conditionality depends on a credible perspective for the target countries of democracy promotion” (Schimmelfennig – Scholtz, 2007: 25).

In sum, the main tool of the ENP has been implicitly approached from liberal perspectives. Of course, *The theory of the ENP* does not only include the effectiveness of political conditionality. Constructivists also contributed to the literature by declaring that the logic of appropriateness or

social learning determine (Börzel – Risse, 2000; Checkel 1999) the effectiveness of EU foreign policy. The governance perspective also shed light on the functioning of the ENP (Lavenex, 2004; Lavenex – Schimmelfennig, 2009). However realists arguments have been clearly side-lined in the process of the building *The theory of the ENP*. In consequence, the theories did not take into account the possibility that a third actor – with its hard power – may impede the effectiveness of the rule transfer to Eastern European states. Multiple forms of leverage and influence, such as interdependence or coercive measures, have been appeared in the literature but the realpolitik ambitions have been mainly missing.

3. A missed element? Analysing Russian foreign policy and its implications on the ENP

Forgetting to write about Russia's geopolitical interests has not been a fundamental mistake for a long time because the priorities of Russian foreign policy and the national interest has always been reconceptualised. Sometimes, Russia was more cooperative with Western states and decided to undertake the necessary reforms. Sometimes, it was more hostile and emphasized the unique Russian character and interests in the world. It should be emphasized that the evolution of Russian foreign policy in the post-Cold War period has not been linear. In other words, it cannot be said that Russian foreign policy changed from cooperative to hostile over the years. Instead, its behaviour vis-à-vis Western states has always fluctuated. For example, President Boris Yeltsin in the early 1990's and President Vladimir Putin in the early 2000's can be both characterized with cooperative behaviour. However, both of them were also hostile: with the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov, Yeltsin became more "hard liner" with the West and Putin became also more assertive around 2004. Thus, Russian foreign policy from the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev to the third election of Vladimir Putin can be divided – at least – in five parts.

The first period dates back before the transition and the appointment of Gorbachev and his foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. The term "New Thinking" in foreign policy was introduced by Gorbachev which opened the way for the Soviet Union to be renewed in the face of the changing global political landscape (Zwick, 1989). Announcing a new paradigm, he did not want to accept the Western liberal political and economic system and change completely the Soviet Union. Instead, he looked for a new relationship with the West but not at the expense of giving up his entire political conviction. After all, Gorbachev was part of the political system of the Soviet Union and did not define himself as a liberal Westernizer and did not believe in the primacy of liberal democracy. Gorbachev proposed cooperation with the deep-rooted enemies in order to create a global unity on the basis of both ideologies, capitalism and socialism. The "common European home", introduced originally by Nikita Khrushchev, was also Gorbachev's main concept to indicate its willingness to bring Russia and the West closer to each other. The main purpose of the Russian leadership was to reduce diplomatic tensions and move in the direction of a new détente. Furthermore, Gorbachev declared that the notion of imperialism was not accurate anymore to criticize the West. Nevertheless, with the continuous decline of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was losing control and the liberals – who criticized him for not being decisive in important foreign policy questions – were consolidating around the then President Boris Yeltsin (Tsygankov, 2010).

The second period was marked with cooperation under the Presidency of Yeltsin and his liberal-minded minister, Andrei Kozyrev. They believed that the adoption of liberal norms and values was the “end of history” which had no alternative. Given that the Soviet Union could not be reformed on the basis of socialism, they believed that Moscow had to undertake reforms leading to the adoption of Western modes of governance. In the early 1990’s, the weight of geopolitics declined and the role of Westernization increased accordingly. The Russian leadership believed that Russia was part of the Western civilization and the only reason why Moscow chose the wrong path during the Soviet era was that the Bolsheviks had hijacked the identity of the country leading to a wrongfully defined vision. The new policy was best characterized by the famous security space from Vancouver to Vladivostok (Leichtova, 2014). Whereas Gorbachev saw the West which intended to teach the rest of the world, Yeltsin and Kozyrev saw the Western civilization with admiration which, in turn, created perfect circumstances for a honeymoon period between the “two blocks”. Russia genuinely worked for gaining full membership in Western international organizations, most notably in NATO (Tsygankov, 2010).

The third period can be characterized with more hostility compared to the vision of foreign minister Kozyrev. With the appointment of Yevgeny Primakov in 1992, the honeymoon was continuously losing momentum. The new foreign minister made absolutely clear that it wanted its country to be more influential in the international system. According to Primakov, the West and Russia have different interests and he emphasized the need for a multipolar world. Yeltsin also changed its tone and declared that Russia was in fact a Eurasian state. In 1995, the President claimed that Russia had a vital interest in the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Adomeit, 2011). In 1997, the National Security Concept determined Russia as a European and an Asian power and sought to have an equal partnership with other great powers. The biggest challenge that Russia was facing, according to the new idea, was the expansion of NATO. For the purpose of mitigating the declining security outlooks, both sides were agreed to sign the document “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between Russia and NATO” which opened the way to Russia for voicing their concerns within the organization (Tsygankov, 2010).

The fourth period was marked again with more cooperation. In the early 2000’s, two major events took place. First, Vladimir Putin was elected as President of the Russian Federation. Second, the United State of America was attacked in September 2001. This major event triggered the turn in Russian foreign policy. Despite for not being a pro-Western liberal, Putin sought to promote its relationship with the United States. The main purpose of the new President was to frame its interests within the strategic commitments of the West proposing to address the old issue of NATO and fight against terrorism. Putin even offered his assistance to support operations in Afghanistan. Putin avoided the talks on the eastward expansion of NATO and moved closer to Western states to achieve common objectives. However, around 2004, circumstances changed: terrorist activities in the northern Caucasus, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the destabilization of central Asia. From Putin’s perspective, the United States wanted to affect the post-Soviet space stepping up their support, for example, their support to change Ukraine. Nevertheless, at that time, Putin did not want to sacrifice its relations with the West

over the crisis in Ukraine and issued a statement welcoming any winner in the Ukrainian presidential elections (Tsygankov, 2010).

The fifth period started around 2004 and its implications have far-reaching consequences on today's politics. At first, it was not the return of Primakov's world but Russia became more and more critical over US unilateralism. It also rejected the offer to become a participant of the ENP because it did not want to become just a partner of the EU but wanted an equal treatment (Adomeit, 2011). At the same time however, Ukraine and Georgia were not only joining the ENP but also declared their desire to join NATO which was, from Putin's perspective, a clear threat to Russia. Moscow still wanted to further develop areas of cooperation, however, they suspected that the West had geopolitical aims in the post-Soviet space. Therefore, Russia started to voice its fears over the developments, however, Putin did not follow the pieces of advice of hard-line Statists at this time who recommended to support separatism in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea. Nevertheless, in 2007, he voiced his concerns by declaring that NATO "represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?" Putin even explained to President Bush that "Ukraine is not a real state" and added that "if Ukraine does enter NATO, Russia would detach eastern Ukraine (and the Crimean Peninsula) and graft them onto Russia" (Blank, 2008).

In 2008, Dmitri Medvedev was elected as President of Russia. He proposed a new security alliance replacing the role of NATO, and on the other hand, blamed the United States for creating the global financial crisis. Medvedev confirmed that it would be ready to do anything to prevent Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO – in April 2008, for instance, Russia blocked issuing those countries Membership Action Plans. President Medvedev stated that Russia had "privileged interests in its border regions" (Clover, 2008). Sergei Lavrov, foreign minister of Russia, also declared that the Eastern Partnership is an attempt by the EU to expand its "sphere of influence" and also stated that Russia had special relations with its neighbours because of "hundreds of years of common history" (Pop, 2009). In addition to NATO expansion, the EU expansion – mainly the Eastern Partnership – seemed also to be a potentially threat to Russia's spheres of influences (Kanet, 2010).

The term 'common European neighbourhood', used under the era of Yeltsin, was rejected and instead the term 'regions adjacent to the EU and Russia borders' became the dominant expression. Not only NATO-Russia relations but EU-Russia relations, slowly but gradually, became a zero-sum game from Russian perspectives. It also became clear that the democratisation efforts by the EU are contrary to the interests of Russia. The instability and the frozen conflicts in its neighbourhood was a tool to prevent the EU to make further progress in the process of democratisation and the creation of a fully-fledged market economy. The dominant position of the Russian elite has become something anti-Western message which consists of rejecting the earlier commitments to create a liberal democracy in Russia. In the meantime, the continuation of the assertive foreign policy has also dominated the discourse in Russia which culminated in the cyber-war against Estonia in 2007, the war in Georgia in 2008 and now the invasion of Ukraine. One of the main purposes of Russian foreign policy is to re-establish its regional and global dominance.

4. Destroying European optimism

The refusal of taking into account the changes in Russian foreign policy and – referring back to the introduction – the strong belief in an optimistic future made it also impossible to foresee what was going to happen in Ukraine. In fact, nobody expected in late 2013 that, after months and years of preparations, Ukraine would ever refuse to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. Everybody believed that Ukraine was eager to replace the old Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). Suddenly, the EU had to face with the harsh reality: it could not take for granted that it was the only player in the town and that its incentives – whether membership or other financial resources – were capable of changing any neighbouring country's political system.

Moreover, the refusal of signing the AA was not, of course, the end of the story. After witnessing the mass protests in Kiev – which was a kind of “Orange Revolution 2” – and Yanukovich's struggle to save its power as President, Russia decided to annex the Crimean Peninsula and destabilize the Eastern parts of Ukraine. Looking behind the intention of Russia is not as easy as it may seem. There is an on-going debate on why Russia intervened in Ukraine. John Mearsheimer, for example, argues that three critical elements led to the invasion of Ukraine: NATO expansion, EU expansion and democracy promotion which he calls the “the West's triple package of policies”. According to Mearsheimer, the main problem has been that the elites in the US and Europe have undermined the logic of realism and the *realpolitik* while they were wedded to the idea of liberal order. Mearsheimer's basic assumption is that great powers are always sensitive to potential threats and do not tolerate deploying military forces on their borders (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Michael McFaul, however, argues that Mearsheimer fails to explain why cooperation and confrontation both characterized US-Russian relations. The two features, according to McFaul, cannot be explained by the expansion of NATO. He claims that the US and Russia would be both better off if they pursued the liberal world order. McFaul's main argument is that “Russian foreign policy did not grow more aggressive in response to U.S. policies; it changed as a result of Russian internal political dynamics” (McFaul et al., 2014). Putin feared of a colour revolution in Russia. Stephen Stefanovich also argues that it was not NATO expansion which caused the current crisis and, similarly to McFaul, claims that “Putin's seizure of Crimea was first and foremost an attempt to recover from his own egregious mistakes” (McFaul et al., 2014).

On the one hand, there is relatively little relevance concerning the question of why Russia intervened in Ukraine from the perspective of this study. The only factor which should be emphasized is the fact that Russia interfered aggressively in Ukraine no matter why it did. On the other hand, it is essential to look at the roots of the problems in order to see the bigger picture. Whatever the situation may be, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and then destabilized the Eastern parts of Ukraine, the question is: what is the impact of the recent development in Ukraine on its democratisation outlook? By invading Ukraine, Russia impedes the democratisation of Ukraine in a number of ways.

First and foremost, Russia largely weakens the statehood of Ukraine which has far-reaching consequence on the ability of the Ukrainian government to implement EU reforms. The reason is simple. Two forms of democracy promotion can be distinguished in international politics. The top-down approach refers to a method in which the “donor” tries to persuade the political elite and leaders to implement the reforms demanded. In other words, the main objective of this approach is to induce change at the “upper level” of a state. Incentives, whether its accession perspective or other types of financial aids, intend to influence the apparatus and encourage them to take all the necessary measures and thus bring about a behavioural change in the target country. The bottom-up approach, on the contrary, aims at giving incentives to the civil society or organizations, associations or any kind of pro-democratic movement. The main purpose of this approach is to induce change at the “lower level” of a state.

While acknowledging the fact that EU democracy promotion can be characterized by both approaches, it is fundamentally based on the top-down approach. By giving various types of incentives, the EU aims at achieving its objectives at the “upper level”. In other words, the EU aims at persuading the elite of a state to undertake the necessary reforms. However, the Ukrainian statehood was called into question by a strong external actor. Therefore, the likelihood of the implementation diminishes. A weakened state cannot undertake the reforms as fast and effectively as for example those states (e.g. CEECs) which were free from external pressures. Moreover, it is unclear whether the current government has the power or the ability to implement reforms in the whole country. By declaring autonomous regions and independence in the Eastern part of the country (whose leaders are supported by Russia), it is obvious that the reforms cannot reach the same level of satisfaction, at least not from EU perspectives. The lack of power over the whole country results in the inability to implement reforms in certain areas.

Second, it should not be forgotten that despite all the difficulties Ukrainians have, the AA has been already signed between the EU and its member states, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part. The agreement truly represents one of the most effective ways for political and economic transformation. However, the AA cannot be applied throughout Ukraine because, similarly to other reforms, the state is not strong enough to implement it throughout the country. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence that the possible signature of the AA partly explains the current crisis. In fact, the Eastern Partnership and its economic and political offers (AA/DCFTA) constitutes a zero sum game: having a free trade agreement with the EU while being in a customs union with the Eurasian Union are mutually exclusive. Of course, Ukraine can have free trade agreements with Russia but the AA makes it impossible to join the customs union with Russia since this latter scenario would mean the introduction of a common trade barrier vis-à-vis others. In addition, the AA is also considered the a backdoor for NATO expansion as it declares that it promotes “gradual convergence on foreign and security matters with the aim of Ukraine’s ever-deeper involvement in the European security area” and seeks to “deepen political association and increase political and security policy convergence and effectiveness” (European Union, 2014).

Third, Russia also hampers the path of European integration by questioning the borders of Ukraine. Since stable and secure borders are a quintessential element of the accession, it is clear that Ukraine cannot guarantee one of the fundamental requirements of the EU (nor NATO’s). It

is also evident that Ukraine was not given membership perspective and can be argued that it must not fulfil all the requirements. While this may be true, the wish of building closer ties with Europe clearly slows down because of the fact that Ukraine is not capable for defending its borders.

Fourth, strongly connected with the above mentioned factors is the existence of regional conflict which is also an obstacle to join Euro-Atlantic international organizations, such as NATO or the EU. Ukraine is not only in a regional conflict but is part of a deep and global political crisis. Today it is not clear how the crisis will end since multiple scenarios can happen. It is less likely that Ukraine as a whole country could move forward in the European path given its current status. Today it is less likely that Ukraine can continue its road towards the EU in its “pre-2013 form”.

It must be emphasized that even if realist arguments may better explain the behaviour of certain states, they certainly cannot excuse their tactics. Realism may serve to put the actions into context in order to better understand a few events of world politics but may not serve for justification. Nevertheless, it is important to draw the lessons: whatever theoretical framework may better explain Russian behaviour, peace and prosperity cannot be taken for granted in Europe, as the case of Ukraine clearly shows the evidence.

5. Conclusion

The ENP was initially planned to achieve its objectives in a more friendly and cooperative international political atmosphere. From the very beginning, it has always suffered from several problems (e.g. lack of membership perspective) but Russia’s intervention in Ukraine became the newest challenge of the policy. The democratisation process is not only slowing down because of the well-known problems of the policy or Ukraine’s interdependence on Russia but also because of the consequences of intervention in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. By weakening the statehood, Ukraine simply cannot undertake the necessary reforms nor can it move – as a whole country – forward European integration.

Given the new international situation in Europe, the ENP has to be more realistic concerning its approach to Ukraine. The EU has already started to reassert its role in its neighbourhood. The new review on the ENP does not use anymore the idealistic buzzword of ‘ring of friends’. Instead, the main political priority has become the stabilisation of the neighbouring countries (European Commission, 2015). Replacing the 2003 European Security Strategy, the new EU Global Strategy will no longer consider Russia as a “strategic partner” but will treat it as a “strategic challenge” (Gotev, 2016). More recently, Donald Tusk said that it is a utopia that Europe can impose its values on the external world (Zalan, 2016). It seems that the EU understands the changes in international politics.

The ENP can be called a “friendly policy” which means that it is able to induce changes provided that the neighbourhood is more or less peaceful and there is no third party which would use its hard power to prevent the objectives of the ENP. However, economic and political integration immediately slows down if a strong third actor intervenes in this process. Russia can be certainly

considered as such actor whose main aim is to prevent Ukraine – as a whole country – joining the EU and NATO. It may be possible that Ukraine may continue its path towards European integration, as the signed AA shows, and may further develop its democratic institutions but its decision may have the price of leaving behind some of its territories in the “grey zone” of Europe.

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